

## **Women's Role in History: Civil Rights**

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Throughout history, women have been discriminated against and their rights ignored and Illinois has been no exception. But, many women have also been trying to earn their rights since as early as the nineteenth century. But what did they do that made them special, and what did they even accomplish? A few select women have made major impacts upon our country and state regarding women's rights.

One of the many women who have fought for their rights was Jane Addams. She was a woman whose courage and determination has been prominent in Illinois history since 1889, when she founded the Hull House, a campus in Chicago that she started with Ellen Gates Starr. This settlement house was a home for women and children. It was built in a neighborhood not among large buildings but around other houses.

Jane Addams did many other things. She was firmly against child labor. "A bill was introduced into legislature in March of 1903, embodying the conclusions of the Federated Women's Clubs of Illinois, the Women's Catholic League, the Chicago Federation of Labor, the Illinois Federation of Labor, and Jane Addams," according to biographer James Webber Linn. This bill forbade any child in Illinois, and the country, under the age of fourteen to work for anyone other than their parents, and any child between the ages of fourteen and sixteen to work over eight-hour days.

In 1881, Jane Addams came across a magazine at her college. It was *Our Herald* and was a women's magazine about the suffrage and hardships of women trying to earn their rights. She was amazed that such a magazine was not more widely read and decided

to help it. Then, in 1891, Addams saw the first suffrage newspaper in the state of Illinois, the *Illinois Suffragist*. “In that year Mrs. McCulloch became Superintendent of Legislative Work for Women’s Suffrage, and led and won the battle to establish the right of women to vote for school trustees, except in such communities dependent on the state constitution, which lawyers believed specifically denied to women the right to vote for constitutional offices,” in the words of James Webber Linn.

Many other newspapers followed the *Illinois Suffragist* in their quest to give women more rights. Most did not hire women to be news reporters because they thought that they could not write, report, or get hard hitting stories as well as men. One woman, “The Duchess,” made sure that women were able to work for newspapers and tell the world their point of views.

Virginia Marmaduke paved the way for women to come into journalism. Chicago was taken by storm as Marmaduke stopped the *Chicago Sun Times* from allowing women to write only in the society pages, fashion, and entertainment sections.

Marmaduke’s first job was writing for the *Herrin Daily Journal* and she showed everyone that she could write and cover stories “just as well as her male counterparts,” according to biographer Jackson Foote.

After that, she applied for a job at the *Chicago Sun Times* and the editor gave her a sheet to fill out. She did, but left one spot blank, namely, the line where she chose what she wanted to do. The editor had given her choices and when he asked, “Why didn’t you fill it in?” She simply responded with the statement that she did not want any of the choices he had offered. He had only offered her categories like society, fashion, and entertainment. She wanted front page, hard-hitting assignments. The editor was taken

aback at first, but loved her edge and hired her on the spot. She worked for many newspapers and they all said that she was the kind of woman who made a difference. Indeed she did, and so have other countless women, the list too long to fit into this article.

In conclusion, society has changed the way we think of women. At first, women were judged as lesser human beings who did not know how to think or act for themselves. That idea had been corrected and now women have just as many rights as most men. Many have changed the way people think. For example, Jane Addams, influenced how the United States treated child labor and women's suffrage. Virginia "Duchess" Marmaduke set an example that promoted an end to discrimination against women in the professional workplace. [From T. Carabillo, J. B. Csida, and J. B. Meuli, *Feminist Chronicles 1953-1993*; Dana Fitzgerald, "Jane Addams," *Illinois History* (Ap. 1998); Jackson Foote, "The Duchess—A Journalism Pioneer," *Illinois History* (Ap. 1997); Elizabeth Frost and Kathryn Cullen-DuPont, *Women's Suffrage in America*; Jessica Knebel, "Mary Harris Jones, Labor's Advocate," *Illinois History* (Dec. 1997); James Webber Linn, *Jane Addams*; Margaret Mary Moran, "Lottie Holman O'Neill," *Illinois History* (Ap. 1994); Dina Lynn Romano, "One Woman, One Vote," *Illinois History* (Ap. 1998); Lynn Sherr, *Failure is Impossible*; and M. W. Sorensen, "Ahead of Their Time," *Illinois Heritage* (Nov. 2001).]